

Racin' The Net

Papyrus enables race fans to run Indy Car races on the Internet.

By Debbie Wicker

As you watch Indy Car racing on TV, many of you have probably wondered what it feels like to drive an Indy Car. Through the magic of computers you can get some sense of it by running one of the Indy Car game simulation programs, like IndyCar II from Papyrus. These games are so accurate that rumors have been flying all year that drivers, including Alex Zanardi and Jacques Villeneuve, have been using these games before a race to improve their skills on a particular track.

Using the Internet, many fans are taking computer racing a step further by racing "against" one another. This means that each participant sets up the IndyCar II game with exactly the same parameters for a particular track. Once the track is set each "driver" will set up his/her own car based on his/her experience at that track. The driver runs the race and sends his actual results to an independent third party on the web, who then analyzes the results and determines a winner.

The best way to understand Internet racing is to talk to people who actually compete on-line. Steve Herrenbruck and Phil Henzig finished 1-2 at the Las Vegas IGNIRL race.

"I've been a computer nut for quite a while and always an Indy Car fan," described Henzig as to how he got involved. "As soon as I got on the Internet earlier this year, the first thing I did was type in ICR2, for IndyCar II. That's when I started finding sites for the races. About the second site I found was the first running of the Indianapolis 500 on the Internet. Needless to say, I learned how to use the email page very quickly and registered and that's where I started out.

"There are several series that are being run, I'm familiar with two of them that I'm currently entered in. One of them is the ICE series, which is the IndyCar European series, where you run the IndyCar simulation, they edit the track to make it look like they're running in Europe, so it's kind of like fantasy IndyCars running European tracks. Then, there's another series that's run in combination, which is the IGNIRL series whose address is www.algonet.se/~roiff/indy2/. This is all of the American oval tracks. You run the tracks, they take the scores from this, and combine them with the road course series, and then you have the Internet champion."

Henzig went on to describe a typical weekend of Internet racing. "You have to have your qualifying time registered by 12:00 your time zone that racing weekend. It has to be uploaded or emailed to the web site.

"Then they (people around the world that run the web site) post the qualifying speeds to the site the next day. They'll take your qualifying time compared with everybody else who submitted and come up with a starting lineup on a Saturday. You can see where you rank with the rest of the people for qualifying.



When you win a race on the Internet your race car is displayed in an electronic winner's circle. Steve Herrenbruck won the Las Vegas competition and claimed bragging rights.

"You're racing against AI and Rahal and Emerson and Tracy and everybody, and they have artificial intelligence files which are in the game which make them react and have the same tendencies as the real drivers. Like AI would be more consistent, he'll be fast but he's not as aggressive as Michael Andretti, Robby Gordon is even more aggressive than Michael Andretti and so on and so forth, and they act that way."

You can run the race any time during the weekend or even the previous week, but it has to be submitted by 12:00 Sunday night, your time zone.

Once everyone has submitted their race files, everyone is ranked in terms

of their race time, how many minutes it took to run the race, average speed and laps led. The finishing order is posted on the web site and bragging rights are established.

Before the season begins you have to select which chassis, tire and engine configuration you will run for the season. You can also paint your own car so that when you win your car is posted. Throughout the season you can do your own chassis setups, tire pressure, shocks and gear ratios. So there is more to winning than just driving the track, very much like real racing you have to do your homework.

Steve Herrenbruck, winner of the IGNIRL North Las Vegas 200, describes what it took to win at Las Vegas.

"You need a good set-up that is balanced for a full fuel load as well as a minimum fuel load," said Herrenbruck. "You also had to be tuned in to how the car felt and not running way over the edge, the car was very good through the whole race. Phil and I had the same set-up. We work as a team and developed qualifying set-ups and race set-ups. We soften the inside (of the chassis) of both the left front and rear which allowed us to run very well in traffic. Indy got snatched from me by a bad pit stop and at Las Vegas I just got lucky."

Henzig finished second and thinks he knows why. "I knew Steve had the lead, I thought I could beat him, but I modified the chassis setup we had worked on together to make it more driveable so it didn't get loose between (turns) one and two, to make it more comfortable. The car was real good, but the last ten laps, I didn't feel like I could run it flat out, and I didn't want to risk blowing the whole thing, so I only went maybe about 99 percent rather than 100 percent, and that cost me the win."

Internet racing has only existed for the past year or so and is likely to become more and more popular. Ann Boswell, Product Manager for IndyCar II says that Papyrus Software has just released a Windows 95 and Mac version of the software. In the spring, NASCAR is launching the first truly interactive version of their game. What does that mean? It means that you could, on-line/real time race against the actual NASCAR drivers and all the other people who qualified. Unbelievable! Stay tuned.